

In many places in the San Fernando Valley families are making a good living on tracts of an acre or two, bought some years ago at a price which would have been impossible to produce crops profitably.

Nothing can be done, however, toward the realization of the Whitsett plan if the present schemes of subdivision and sale of lots at abnormally high prices are carried out. Those who are behind these schemes are worthy men, following out the traditions of their class, but it readily will be seen that if the land is all to be subdivided and sold in small lots, the owners of which must pay special assessment taxes, land prices will be raised to a point where it will become an impossibility to produce crops profitably.

Without vision the people perish." Here is a man of vision, looking forward to the greatest future good for the greatest future number, and his recommendations should receive the careful attention of the City Planning Commission to the end that a system of development may be worked out along the lines he has laid down.

The evolution and conservation of a general irrigation system and its free use for agricultural purposes in the valley of San Fernando are set forth in the plan, together with an interesting statement of the present real-estate situation and the agricultural development of the valley have made him a high authority on its economic needs. He says very truly that this region is a place where small farming, gardening, poultry-raising and light manufacturing may be developed and carried on in a way to produce \$50,000,000 annually in agricultural and industrial wealth instead of the \$20,000,000 it is now producing. It affords the greatest opportunity now available to build a great garden city—a place of refuge from the impossible, unlivable conditions found in many badly congested modern cities in the East.

That is the bright dream of W. P. Whitsett, Water Commissioner for the City of Los Angeles, and it is a dream that, if realized, would bring happiness to many human hearts. Mr. Whitsett presented the idea at the recent celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of Van Nuys, now a part of the territory annexed to Los Angeles, in response to a request for a condensed plan for the best economic development of that fertile and thriving district.

A beautiful, widespread, self-supporting garden city in San Fernando Valley—a city of half a million people, free from the conditions of congestion from which so many urban folk are trying to flee, with a permanent livehood from the land!

Editorial Reprinted from the Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1926

My acquired knowledge of the subject has led me to believe that with these nature balanced economic opportunities through conservation of water, and soil production—suitable light manufacturing on the valley floor—high class suburban home places and golf courses around the encircling hills—the building up of a great educational center around Van Nuys, the center of the valley, with its fine schools and its close proximity of the new University site when Van Nuys boulevard is cut through the mountains; it requires no great imagination to picture a hundred thousand families happily and permanently employed—living in contentment in this wonderful valley less than ten years from today.

Think of it! Nearly 500,000 people—half the present population of the City of Los Angeles.

Think what it will mean to that great city in conservation of water!

Think of the wonderful opportunities for life in the open, in producing \$50,000,000 of garden products annually!

Think of the great construction activities in the building of 100,000 homes at an average cost of \$3,500, three hundred and fifty million dollars, thirty-five million dollars a year for ten years!

Men and women, this is the greatest opportunity that has even come to any community to build a great self-supporting garden city—a city that will aid in the march of progress in decentralization from the impossible, unlivable conditions from which people are trying to flee in congested eastern cities.

Think of what an opportunity we have to contribute to better citizenship!

Now, just one word of warning!

These nature balanced, carefully adjusted productive, educational, manufacturing and living possibilities can be forever destroyed by the activities of exploiting real estate lot subdividers—by the voting of needless special assessment taxes—and by raising of land prices to a point where it becomes an impossibility to produce crops profitably.

These are the pitfalls in the way—the stumbling blocks in the path of a great community's progress toward broader, better things; but they are obstacles plainly seen and recognized—and by foresight and concerted action upon our part they can and must be avoided, if we are to realize the high hopes and the great ambitions that are the natural destiny of our community.

It would be a great advantage to Los Angeles to have production doubled in the San Fernando Valley. But it may not only not be increased but greatly decreased if the trend of things continues. Los Angeles will have to go farther and farther for its vegetables, poultry and other products and pay more for them. But a rational system of development would give the valley a still better market here, it would provide self-supporting home acres for 100,000 families, happily and permanently employed in healthful, outdoor occupations, leading lives of contentment, and all in less than ten years from today. It would be something to advertise and to realize.

By foresight and concerted action on the part of the city planners and other leaders of physical Los Angeles the idea of the great garden city may be carried out. Its fruition would mean a world of good to the valley, to Los Angeles and particularly to the newcomer of limited means who would find here a fine opportunity for a good living to be gotten out of the rich, warm earth under the blue California skies.

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Los Angeles, through its Planning Commission and its Department of Water and Power, together with other city organizations, should take immediate steps to see that no more agricultural lands are cut into smaller tracts than one acre—unless houses are to be built thereon at once. Two to five acre plots would be the more practical size, were it possible to bring about such a condition of subdivision.

Informed statisticians tell us that unless we produce this \$50,000,000 of needed garden products at home, we will have to go to the intermountain states for them. San Fernando is a mountain valley—elevation being 750 feet in Van Nuys. Our seasons are later than those of the hot inland valleys, which have shipped their perishable garden products from the state at a time when our production comes on the markets just when it is most needed by Los Angeles. It would then cost Los Angeles twice as much to procure an inferior article, and would necessitate transporting it great distances. It would take from the trade channels of the metropolitan city over one hundred million dollars annually.

So that I may bring the economic importance of this great possibility to your earnest consideration—I will state that there has been tabulated by the Water Department of Los Angeles statistics that show for this valley probably the greatest diversification of agricultural production in all America over a similar area.

That you may examine further the available proof in reference to some of this, I wish to quote results with reference to the poultry industry which we started at Van Nuys in 1912. There is now invested in the poultry industry \$9,240,000. Fifteen hundred families now care for 1,350,000 birds, which produce 194,400,000 eggs annually! The eggs alone, if put end to end, would extend a greater distance than to New York City and return—6,183 miles of eggs—selling last year for \$6,750,000!

In our economic plan we now come to the most important subject of all—beneficial employment for those desiring to live in Southern California—where they may enjoy the sunshine of the great outdoors, surrounded by the beauties of nature.

I am preparing to make a bold statement, but before making it, I want to say that my intimate connections with the building of Van Nuys, and the intensive agricultural development of the valley, has compelled me to give this matter more thought than probably any other living man; and my position as Commissioner of Water & Power for the City of Los Angeles enables me to understand this water problem better than those who have had less opportunity to study the facts.

beginning of the run-off period to the end of the critical dry period.

These statistics will enable you to better understand the importance of underground water conservation in the San Fernando Valley.

Third, there is the water from the snows of the High Sierras that is delivered through the two hundred and fifty mile Owens River Aqueduct—distributed through steel underground mains laid every half mile apart, over 100,000 acres of the valley floor. Some of these mains are large enough for a man to walk through—and there are 681 miles of them in all!

This system was built under a bond issue that was voted by the valley in 1914, amounting to \$2,994,000. Of this amount \$692,000 has been repaid to the present time. The system was designed by Chief Engineer William Mulholland to deliver one inch continuous flow to every seven and a half acres—which amount, when stored and delivered during our irrigating season, is sufficient to grow a very broad diversification of necessary agricultural crops. This, at the same time, is the exact amount of water required for 35 fifty foot lots when improved with the California bungalow—just the number of lots that can be cut from seven and a half acres.

One-third of the aqueduct water used for irrigation in the San Fernando Valley finds its way into the great underground reservoir to which I have previously referred—and, by thus using it for irrigation, we probably conserve much more for the end of dry periods by the saving of the enormous surface evaporation, than would be the case were we to store it in open surface reservoirs over a number of years—which is, of course, not possible.

To my mind, it is imperative that the City of Los Angeles encourage the spread of this surplus aqueduct water by means of irrigation in the San Fernando Valley—at least until the coming of Colorado River water, and the consequent removal of the dire necessity of conserving surplus water in plentiful years to provide for domestic needs at the critical end of recurrent dry periods—such as that we have just experienced.

This brings to mind the consideration of another subject of nearly as great importance to Los Angeles—the question of garden production—the great by-product in the maintenance of underground water reserve.

The San Fernando Valley now produces over \$20,000,000 worth of needed agricultural crops, and demonstrated proof is evident that such production can be increased to at least \$50,000,000 annually if subdividers are prevented from cutting the large ranches into impractical small pieces—to sell at impossibly high prices.

San Fernando Valley

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6402 VAN NUYS BLVD
Corner of Victory Blvd.
VAN NUYS, CALIFORNIA
Phone Van Nuys 415

Having been requested by some very thoughtful people to present a condensed plan covering the proper economic development of this annexed territory of the city of Los Angeles, I am taking this birthday occasion to express my observations in this regard. Faith, hope, work, and water have been the four factors in the development of our community. The outstanding factors of all—not only in the growth of Van Nuys and the San Fernando Valley, but of all Southern California likewise—has been WATER! To water, probably more than to any other element, we owe our very existence!

What are the water resources of this great, fertile valley?

First, natural rainfall on the valley floor. This has averaged more than fifteen inches per year for a period of forty-seven years—from 1877 to 1924.

Second, the run-off from 502 square miles of mountain watershed which surrounds the valley, an area three times that of the valley floor itself. Precipitation in this mountainous area is much greater than that of the valley, but it must not be allowed to waste away—it must be conserved. For this purpose a great control dam, 375 feet high, is now being built in Pacoima Canyon. Others are to follow until eventually this run-off will be regulated in flood season and the water fed gradually through the gravel comes and porous lands into the great natural underground reservoir which underlies San Fernando Valley. From this reservoir there was pumped last year for domestic consumption, thirteen billion six hundred and fifty million gallons—nearly enough water to fill the domestic needs of 400,000 people—a city almost half the present size of Los Angeles.

The reserve water pumped from this gravel reservoir last year prevented the curtailment of the domestic water in metropolitan Los Angeles; and the reservoir still contains 158,000 acre feet—enough for the needs of 1,000,000 people for another year.

In order that you may better understand the importance of this great underground reservoir—remember that in case you do not need the water next year because of recent rains and promising snows in the High Sierras, or, if the necessity of pumping it out does not occur before then, it will still be there ten years hence—at the time when our ever-recurring dry period is apt to reappear—when more than twice our present population may be dependent upon it. We have no location here where it is most needed for such a reservoir upon the surface—but even if we had, it would be worth \$40,000,000 as compared in capacity cost to other recently constructed surface reservoirs. Then, too, there is a six-foot surface evaporation per year for such reservoirs—to say nothing of the disagreeable stagnation occurring when it is attempted to hold water therein from the

Submitted by
W. P. WHITSETT
on the
Fifteenth Anniversary of the Founding
of Van Nuys